



Preparing for the Senior Executive Service

U.S. Office of Personnel Management

Employee Services

Senior Executive Service and Performance Management

Agenda

- **Overview of the Senior Executive Service (SES)**
- **How Do I Become an SES Member?**
 - SES Hiring Process
 - Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs)
 - Telling Your Story
- **Qualifications Review Board (QRB) Certification**
- **Plan of Action: How to Get There?**
 - Personal Assessment
 - Proactive Approach to Development
- **Valuable Resources**
- **Q & A**



The Senior Executive Service

The Senior Executive Service

- Original SES established by Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 (Title 5)
- Places top management positions with greater scope and complexity, into a distinct personnel system, which provides agency authority and flexibility.
- Members are selected for their leadership qualifications and serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees.
- Major link between Presidential appointees and the rest of the Federal work force.
- SES positions are managerial, supervisory, and policy positions classified above the GS-15 grade level.

Responsibilities

- Engages in any of the following activities:
 - directs the work of an organizational unit;
 - accountable for the success of one or more specific programs or projects;
 - monitors progress toward organizational goals and periodically evaluates and makes appropriate adjustments to such goals;
 - supervises the work of employees (other than personal assistants); or
 - exercises important policy-making, policy-determining, or other executive functions.

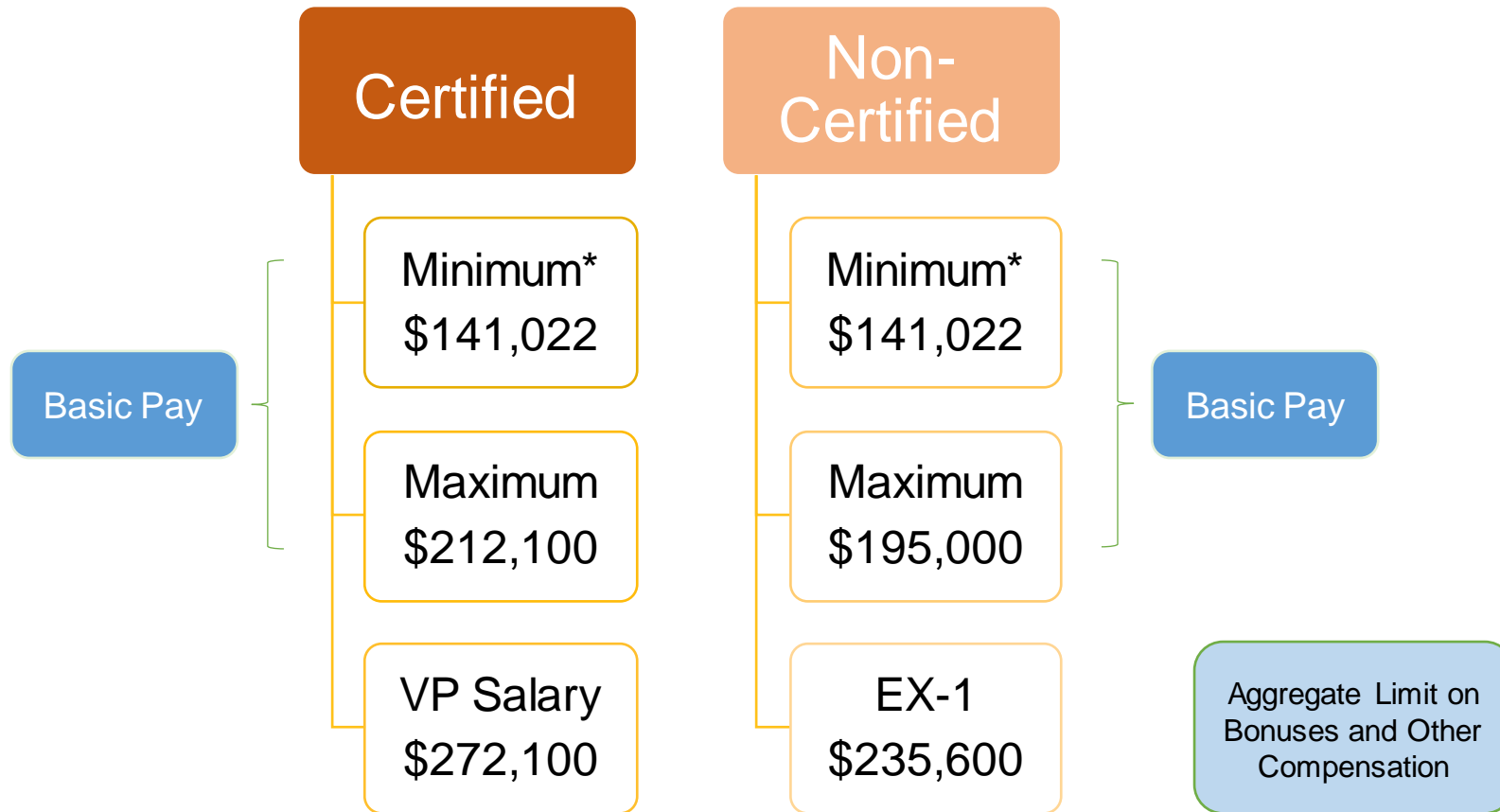
Expectations

- Possess executive skills not typically required of employees
- Significant interface with political leadership
- Broad scope and very complex
- At least 25% supervisory responsibilities
- Involves executive and management responsibilities.

Types of SES Appointments

- Career (**Competitive**) - Made without time limitations and provide certain job protections and benefits not conferred by the other types of SES appointments.
- Non-Career (**Non-Competitive**) - Made without time limitation, but the appointee serves at the pleasure of the appointing authority. The agency must have a non-career appointment authority from OPM.
- Limited Term (**Competitive** or **Non-Competitive**) - Can only be made to a position for which the duties will expire at the end of a specified period or under other special circumstances for a period not to exceed 3 years.
- Limited Emergency (**Non-Competitive**) - Can only be made to meet a bona fide, unanticipated, urgent need for a period not to exceed 18 months.

SES Pay and Pay Ranges





Executive Core Qualifications

Telling your Story

Executive Core Qualifications (ECQs)

What are they?

- Describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES and reinforce the concept of an “SES corporate culture.

How are they used?

- Designed to assess executive experience and potential not technical expertise.
- Measure whether an individual has the broad executive skills needed to succeed in a variety of SES positions

How were they determined?

- Through extensive research of the attributes of successful executives in both the private and public sectors
- A collaboration, reflecting the best thinking of senior executives, thought leaders, professional associations, and human resource advocates

ECQs



Six Fundamental Competencies

**Interpersonal
Skills**

**Oral
Communication**

Integrity/Honesty

**Written
Communication**

**Continual
Learning**

**Public Service
Motivation**

Leading Change

Involves the ability to bring about strategic change, both within and outside the organization, to meet organizational goals

Inherent is the ability to:

- establish an organizational vision
- implement it in a continuously-changing environment



Leading Change Competencies

Creativity and Innovation

- New insights, encourages new ideas and innovations

External Awareness

- Up to date on local, national and international policies and trends

Flexibility

- Open to change and adapts to changing conditions or unexpected obstacles

Resilience

- Deals effectively with pressure

Strategic Thinking

- Formulates objectives and priorities and implements plans

Vision

- Acts as catalyst for organizational change and translates vision into action

Leading Change- What should the focus be?

Questions
to ask
yourself
when
describing
your
experience

- What was my organizational vision?
- How did I transcend my vision into action? What initiative did I take?
- Did I strategically initiate and implement transformational change?
- How did I deal with unexpected organizational changes/obstacles (to internal/external pressures)?
- Did my vision achieve measurable results that impacted the organization?

Leading People

Involves the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals

Inherent is the ability to provide an inclusive workplace that:

- fosters the development of others
- facilitates cooperation and teamwork
- supports constructive resolution of conflicts



Leading People Competencies

Team Building

- Inspires and fosters team commitment. Facilitates cooperation and motivates to accomplish goals

Conflict Management

- Anticipates and takes steps to prevent counter-productive confrontations

Developing Others

- Develops the ability of others to perform and contribute to the organization

Leveraging Diversity

- Fosters an inclusive workplace where diversity and differences are valued

Leading People- What should the focus be?

**Questions
to ask
yourself
when
describing
your
experience**

- **What is the largest staff size I have led? What challenges did leading a large staff present?**
- **Was I leading versus managing?**
- **How did I contribute to the professional development of my employees (individually or as a team)?**
- **How did I deal with conflicts that arose within my team?**
- **How did I leverage diversity amongst my team (age, cultural, race, skill levels, perspectives)?**

Results Driven

Involves the ability to meet organizational goals and customer expectations

Inherent is the ability to:

- make decisions that produce high-quality results by applying technical knowledge, analyzing problems, and calculating risks



Results Driven Competencies

Accountability

- Holds self and others accountable for measurable high-quality, timely and cost-effective results

Customer Service

- Anticipates and meets the needs of both internal and external customers

Decisiveness

- Makes well-informed, effective, timely decisions with limited data

Entrepreneurship

- Positions the organization for success by identifying new opportunities

Problem Solving

- Identifies and analyzes problems

Technical Credibility

- Appropriately applies principles, procedures, regulations related to specialized expertise

Results Driven- What should the focus be?

**Questions to
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experience**

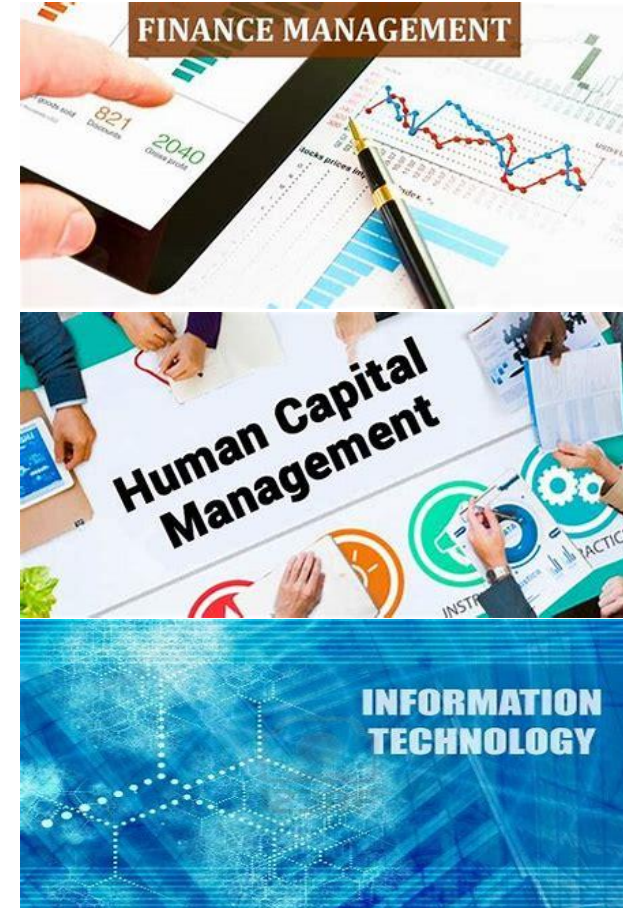
- How did the priorities and objectives I set lead to high-quality/quantity results?
- How did I address the needs of customers and stakeholders (internal and external)?
- How did my decisions and actions impact results?
- Did I identify problems and implement solutions that resulted in improving services?

Business Acumen

Involves the ability to manage human, financial, and information resources strategically

Inherent is the ability to:

- effectively manage human, financial, and information resources to meet organizational goals



Business Acumen Competencies

Financial Management

- Prepares, justifies, and administers program budget. Oversees procurement and contracting

Human Capital Management

- Recruits, builds, and manages multi-sector workforce and manages a variety of work situations

Technology Management

- Makes effective use of technology to achieve results

Business Acumen- What should the focus be?

Questions to
ask yourself
when
describing
your
experience

- What is my experience in creating and administering budgets and resources?
- How did I procure and utilize resources? What obstacles did I face in doing this?
- What was the size of budget and resources I managed? How much money saved?
- What is my experience with a multi-sector workforce? Percentage of backlog eliminated/reduced? Length of processing time reduced?
- How did I utilize technology to create or improve programs?

Building Coalitions

Involves the ability to build coalitions internally and with other Federal agencies, State and local governments, nonprofit and private sector organizations, foreign governments, or international organizations to achieve common goals

Inherent is the ability to:

- Develop networks through partnering and collaboration



Building Coalitions Competencies

Partnering

- Develops networks and builds alliances

Political Savvy

- Perceives organizational and political realities and acts accordingly

Influencing/Negotiating

- Persuades others and builds consensus through give and take. Gains cooperation from others to accomplish goals

Building Coalitions- What should the focus be?

**Questions to
ask yourself
when
describing
your
experience**

- What groups/networks (internal and external) did I partner with to achieve a goal?
- How did I bring groups together? What challenges did I face doing that?
- What did I do to build coalitions?

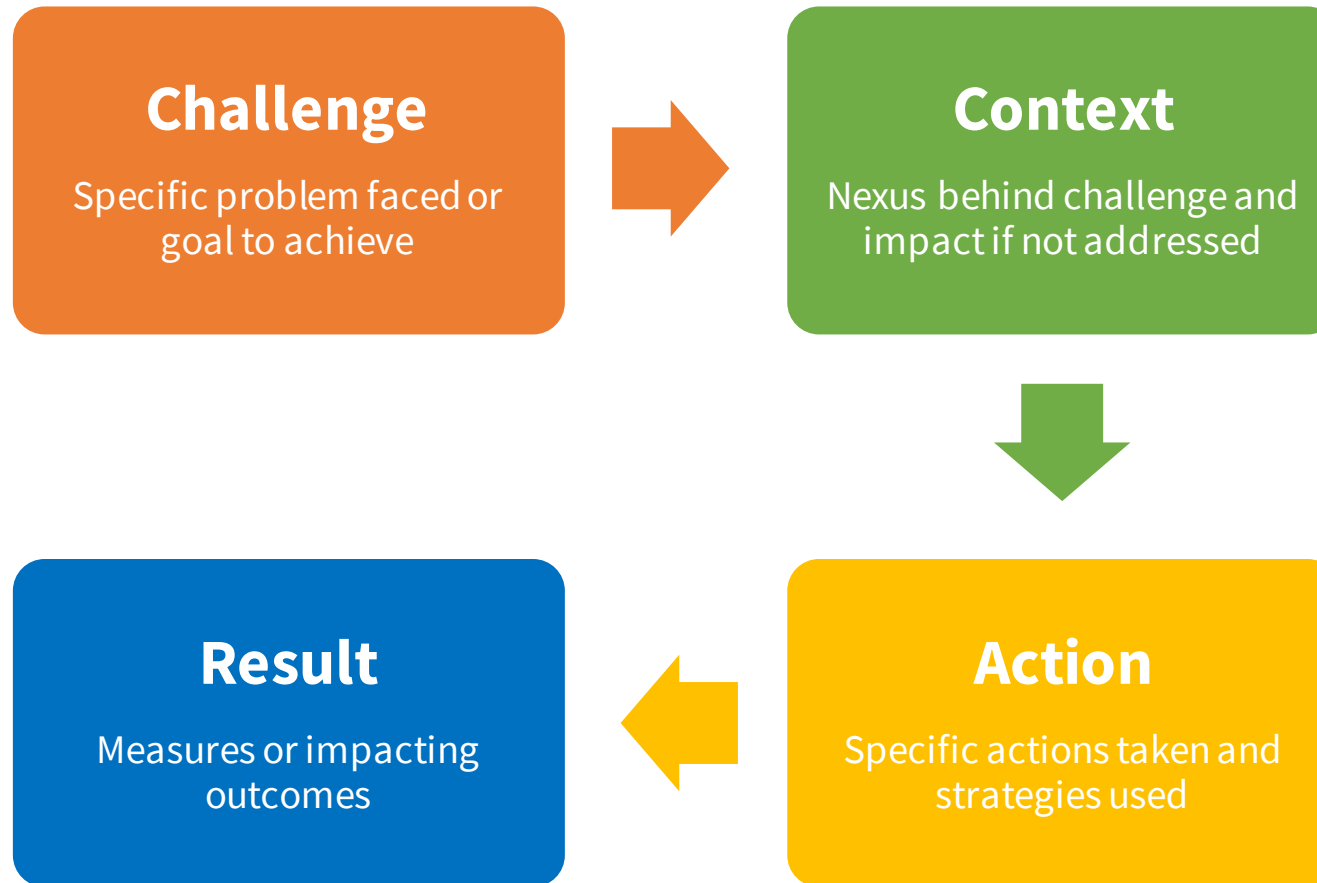


How Should You Tell Your Story

Challenge-Context-Action-Result (CCAR)

- Results-oriented approach that requires YOU to focus on the leadership skills demonstrated in leading and managing programs, processes, and people.
- Helps provide a complete picture of leadership competencies and the specific role YOU played in an organization's success.
- Focus on what YOU accomplished, that led to organizational success
- Completed in 1st person
- Used in 10-page ECQ narrative (Traditional Method)
- No more than **2 examples** per ECQ

C-C-A-R



Example (Challenge)

As the Associate Director in 2019, I was ***challenged to lead the design and implementation of new practices*** to improve the Department's Performance Management System process for its SES and Senior Level (SL) and Scientific and Professional (ST) cadre.

Example (Context)

Formerly, the process was decentralized and relied heavily upon the components to complete necessary steps of the process. With the establishment of the new center, administration of performance management processes became centralized and managed by the center. This caused consternation among the components who each had distinctive cultures, different performance management philosophies and operating instructions, and different motivations. Additionally, because of the varying processes, submission of completed appraisals to the Departmental Performance Review Board (PRB) were consistently late which delayed the PRB process, resulting in delayed payout of annual performance-based pay adjustments and bonuses by seven months. Lastly, because PRB recommendations were returned to the component heads for final approval, 90 percent of the PRB recommendations were ignored which challenged the integrity of the process and subsequently certification by OPM.

Example (Action)

I first met with each of the HR Directors to understand their operating processes and concerns and provided an in-depth brief on the proposed new processes highlighting the broader, strategic implications. In order to deftly manage the interests and viewpoints of the components, *I then established* bi-weekly counterpart meetings to ensure all components concerns were appropriately discussed and fostered member participation. I began the first meeting by educating my counterparts on the OPM policies and requirements, the performance management certification process, and the part each component played in the big picture pertaining to having a fully certified system, and the DOT goals and objectives for a successful SES performance management system. *I also shared the process map I created* that would go into place and noted the changes would go into effect for the upcoming annual performance management cycle close out (four months away). One of the largest components was very contentious and pushing to keep the status quo. As it were, they most often rejected the recommendations of the PRB and rarely showed the OPM required distinction in ratings and performance payouts.

Example (Action cont'd)

I tactfully, yet diplomatically, addressed their opinions and stressed the role of the EPRC and the reality of the upcoming changes. Moving forward from that meeting, *I ensured* the group had draft materials and the process map at every meeting to highlight and reinforce key factors that would be important to each component. *I solicited* their feedback on the drafts and compromised on some guidance requirements. *I highlighted* the differences in the processes, internal guidance, and timelines to emphasize the need for an on-time consistent process. *I also touched* on the benefit to the HR teams which was they would no longer be burdened with the tedious pieces of the process. This approach was extremely helpful as it kept the group focused as *I managed* expectations and ensured that each member felt as though their concerns were being heard.

Over the months preceding the start of the cycle close out process, *I worked* with the group to reenforce understanding and built the relationships needed to support my team through their first time managing the close out process. *I engaged* with the group to receive consensus on proposed guidance and timelines and to develop a briefing that we would present to component leadership highlighting the benefits and impact of the center assuming responsibility.

Example (Result)

As a result of my leadership, the process and guidance ***were standardized across all of the components***. Our first experience assuming management of the process allowed performance payouts to be ***completed within four months*** of the cycle ending. This garnered us significant praise from executives and DOT leadership alike. We continue to maintain our standard and have gained the confidence of our component's counterparts and leadership.

General Tips

- Write-up is focused on demonstrated executive leadership; not managerial or technical
- Examples are less than 10 years old
- Follow CCAR model; include the why, how, and what
- Provide examples that are relevant to leadership
- Majority of competencies should be addressed
- Focus on “I” versus “We”
- Examples organized well (clear and easy to follow)

Writing and Reviewing Tips

DO

- Strictly adhere to 1-inch margins, 12pt font and 10 pg limit
- Number pages
- ***Limit introductory paragraphs to 1 paragraph***
- Use personal “I” instead of 3rd person
- Write in layman's terms
- ***Proofread***

- Grammatical errors (speling, sintaks, punktooation)
- ***Using the same example for more than one ECQ***
- Referring readers to other parts of the narrative
- Overuse bolding and underlining
- Including pictures, graphs etc. expressions
- Including ECQ definitions

AVOID

Writing and Reviewing Tips (cont'd)

DO

- Use experience in the public and private sector or as a volunteer
- Describe experiences in a clear and organized manner. Be succinct
- **Follow CCAR**
- Include measurable results
- **Use action-oriented verbs**
- Transition smoothly
- Spell out and limit use of acronyms

- Making disparaging remarks about former managers/agencies/orgs
- Revealing information about political affiliations
- Using bureaucratic words and expressions
- Statements of beliefs or philosophies or commitments to social or political causes

AVOID



ECQs and Your Resume

- ECQs should be reflected/evidenced in the resume.
- Should show breadth, depth, and scope of experience, responsibility, and accomplishments, and a logical progression of jobs/assignments (Information used to enhance and support ECQ narrative).
- Ensure accomplishments are relevant to, and focused on, demonstrated executive leadership, show possession of the ECQs, and match competencies.
- Include grade – key to understanding your level of preparation.

Your Resume

Scope

- The number and position of people affected; the size of the problem addressed; track record of successful performance in a variety of agencies/departments/areas

Breadth/Depth

- Managerial/Leadership responsibility beyond functional expertise.
- Evolvment of broader skills
- Increased level of challenges

Complexity

- Taking more things, people, data, concepts or completeness into account (i.e., size of staff, size of budget, size of organization)



Qualifications Review Board

What is it?

Independent panel

- Comprised of SES members
- Review and certify executive qualifications of agency selectees
- Assess selectee's demonstrated experience within the context of the ECQs



Panel Responsibilities

- Independent review followed by discussion and consensus or majority vote
- Assess the overall scope, breadth, and depth of a selectee's executive qualifications
- Determine whether the candidate has demonstrated executive level expertise and possesses the executive qualifications required for entry and success in the SES.
- Certify the executive qualifications of all new career SES appointees and Candidate Development Program graduates.

NOTE

- Does not rate, rank, or compare one selectee's qualifications against those of other selectees.
- Does not consider or see TQ responses

QRB Submission Methods

Narrative

- 10-page ECQ narrative

QRB Template

- Formatted template based on ECQ

Structured Interview

- **COMING SOON**

QRB Submission Criteria

Criterion A

- Demonstrated executive experience

Criterion B

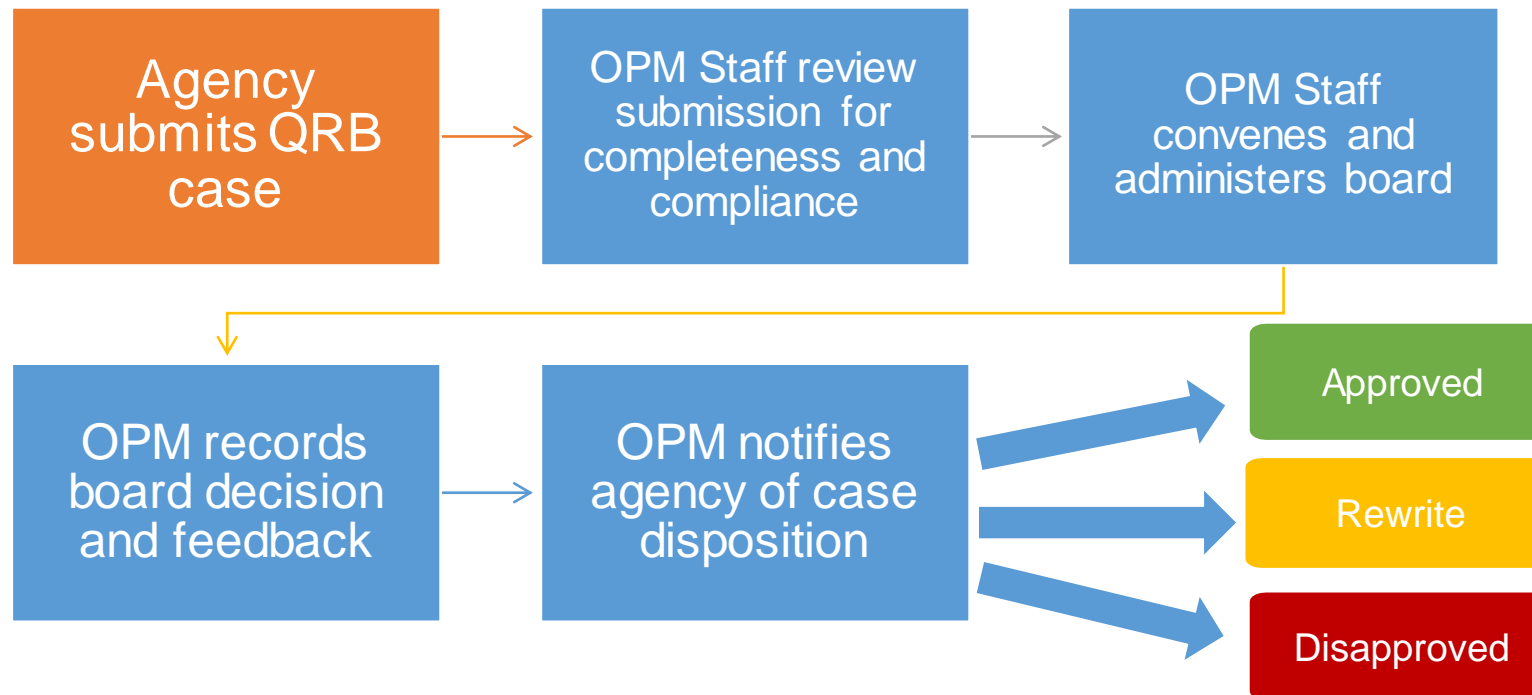
- Completion of SES Candidate Development Program

Criterion C

- Possession of special or unique qualities

Administration Process

20 working days from receipt of agency submission



Review Process

- QRB Orientations held quarterly
 - Knowledge transfer
 - QRB Case review simulation
- QRB members receive case(s) in advance of scheduled meeting
 - Members makes a preliminary recommendation and forwards to OPM
 - OPM reconciles preliminary recommendations for discussion
- Case discussion required for “Discuss” or “Disapproved” preliminary recommendations

Common Themes

- Excessive description of challenges and context versus specific leadership actions and results
- Actions discussed limited in impact
- Leadership actions taken to mitigate challenges described not aligned
- Multiple vignettes (versus 1-2 e.g.) within an ECQ leading to under-developed descriptions lacking substance
- Actions described in terms of “we”; difficult to differentiate group’s actions from selectees’ individual actions
- Mention of the competencies as “buzzwords”, with no substantive information to show demonstration of the competencies
- Same example used in multiple ECQs

Case Disposition and Impact

Approve

- Candidate may be appointed (subject to agency process)
- QRB certification does not expire. However, can be lost

Disapprove

- One reconsideration. Revision of three or more ECQ areas resubmitted within 60 business days

Re-Write

- Tabled decision pending revision of two or less ECQ areas. Revision resubmitted within 14 business days

Disapproval Disposition

First Time

- Revise the case using QRB feedback and resubmit
- Use an alternative action (e.g. resubmitting as a Criterion C)
- Resubmit the case to another QRB, as is

Second Time

- A new case on the same individual for the same position may not be submitted until the candidate has acquired additional qualifying experience.
- A new merit staffing competition to credit the additional experience is required and the closing date of the new announcement must be at least 12 months later than the closing date of the original announcement.



Your Plan of Action

Self Assessment

PROFESSIONAL

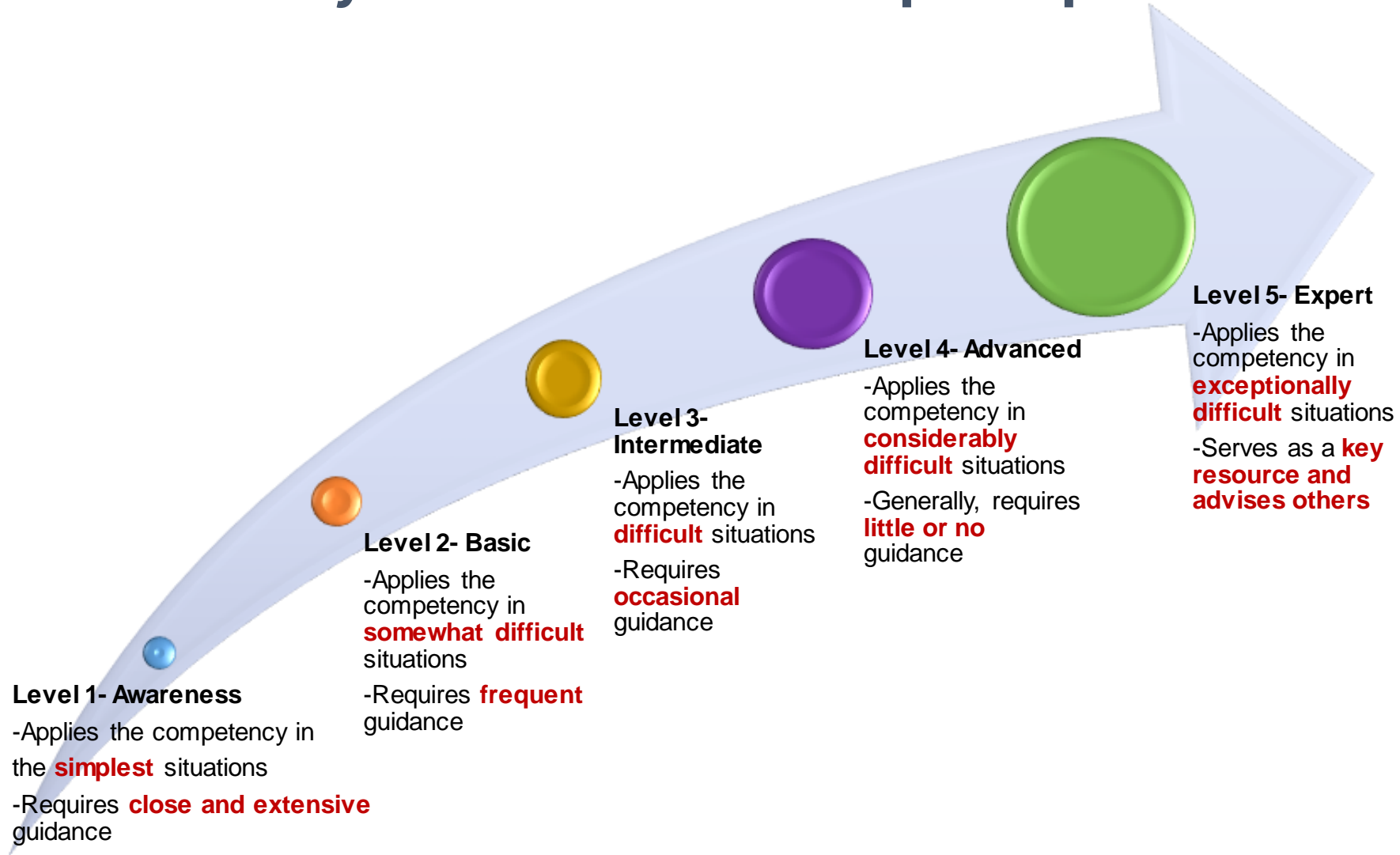
- Technical Qualifications
- Executive Core Qualifications
- Well-Rounded



PERSONAL

- Added Responsibility
- Time Commitments
- Work–Life Balance

Proficiency Levels for Leadership Competencies



Take Action

Personal Assessment

- Evaluate your reasons for wanting to be an SES.
- Review your experience against ECQs – Do you meet them?
- Start writing ECQs NOW and continuously review and edit. It takes 30-40 hours to do well.
- Obtain an SES mentor.



Take Action

Proactive Approach

- Identify and perform jobs that require problem solving.
- Rotations – line to staff, operations to policy, headquarters to field offices.
- Identify and take on projects and task forces that require application of the leadership competencies.
- Internal and/or external details.



Next Steps?

- **Make Connections**

- Individual agency/department Executive Resources staff
- Senior Executives within agency
- Mentor/Champion
- Personal Networks

- **OPM Tools & Guidance**

- OPM Executive Development Best Practices Guide
- OPM Supervisory and Managerial Frameworks and Guidance
- Effective Learning Interventions for Developing ECQs
- Guide to SES Qualifications
- OPM Proficiency Levels for Leadership Competencies

Resources

Guide to SES Qualifications

[OPM Guide to SES Qualifications](#)

OPM Website

[The Senior Executive Service FAQs](#)



Contact
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